

How To Make the Most Out Of Your Fulbright in Mar del Plata

Congratulations on your Fulbright grant and welcome to Mar del Plata! I hope this guide helps you integrate quickly and directly into your new life in Argentina. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at jennifer.timm@gmail.com. Buena suerte y que la pases lindo!

Work

You will work at two main locations: the national university (*Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata*) and the language laboratory downtown that is connected to the university. At the university, you will work with students studying English at the *Profesorado de Inglés*. At the laboratory, you will work with students from the community who are of diverse ages and backgrounds. You do not have a clearly defined role and for this reason, it is important to be as proactive as possible from the first day. This, of course, is hard to do when you arrive in a foreign place in an unknown system. Hopefully the tips below will help you dive right in.

1. *Making Yourself Known*: I suggest sending out an e-mail to all professors when you arrive and tell them that you will be in the modern languages department for a specific time block (perhaps one afternoon and one morning – bring a book!). Ask people to stop by and introduce themselves and propose ideas for possible collaborations later in the semester. Set dates if you can. You can send an e-mail to modernas@mdp.edu.ar and the secretary will forward it to all faculty. You could also do the same for the students. I found that many students had no idea who I was or even that I was there, despite the e-mails I sent and posters I put up. Ask each professor to announce your activities to his or her class and, even better, try to visit each class and “sell” your activities.
2. *Work Responsibilities*: As previously mentioned, your work responsibilities are undefined. You have several options for how to divide your time.
 - a. *Assisting with a specific class*: One possibility is to assist with a specific class. You would coordinate with one specific professor and serve as a teaching assistant. If you decide to do this, make sure that you are clear on what your responsibilities will be and if there will be time for you to actively contribute (by giving class some days, giving presentations, etc.). Be aware that many classes already have teaching assistants. Good classes to assist with are the intro language classes, where students are still learning the language.
 - b. *Running additional workshops and classes*: I found it useful and rewarding to organize workshops and lead supplemental classes to fulfill my responsibilities. By running extra activities, I found that I was more active and felt like I was contributing more. Check out the blog we started to share teaching ideas (it has some interesting stuff, although it could be more complete): <http://argentinaeta08.blogspot.com/>. If you want to keep this going for next year, I can pass along the administrator information.

Some successful activities at the university were:

- i. Conversation workshops: The first semester I led three different sessions based on skill level. In the first semester, the university offers INI (*Inglés Nivel Intermedio*) and INA (*Inglés Nivel Avanzado*). These courses are introductory classes designed to strengthen the language level of students who do not yet have a high enough level of English to begin the course of study. I had workshops that catered specifically to each group and then a separate workshop for students who had already passed INI and INA. In the second semester, I led two workshops per week. Generally there are fewer students at the university second semester and only INA is offered. In the workshops, I tried to do a wide range of activities to improve speaking and listening skills, as well as discuss interesting cultural issues from the English-speaking world. I also found it useful to dedicate a portion of each class to global current events.

During the first week of classes, contact the INI and INA professors and find a time to go to their classes to present your workshops and decide on a timetable that works for the maximum number of students. Ask in the department to see the schedule to find potential timeslots that would fit into the typical schedule of an INI or INA student and go with two or three times in mind. You can find the master list of courses offered posted in the glass case outside of the department. Check there to get the professors' names and get in contact with them as soon as possible to set up a time to visit class. Another option would be to figure out when the class meets and show up at the beginning or end and speak to the professor directly. I found that offering more than two (in the second semester) or three (in the first semester) was counterproductive.

Unfortunately, the workshops are not obligatory and attendance tends to drop off as soon as the semester (and subsequent coursework) kicks into full gear. Talk to the teachers to see if they can create an incentive for the students to attend the workshops. One teacher gave students extra credit for attending a certain number of workshops during the semester. This type of incentive often helps keep attendance numbers from dropping off completely.

- ii. Teacher Conversation Workshops: Each semester, I ran a twice-monthly workshop for teachers. Several teachers approached me and told me that they although felt confident with their academic English, they felt slightly less confident with their informal "chitchatting" English. I used this input to structure the workshops: half of the time discussing an article (any topic) chosen by a group member and the other half talking about anything that came up (current events, life, etc.). Because the participants had full schedules (both at home and at work), we decided to meet once every two weeks at a café downtown for 1-2 hours. This structure worked very well – it kept the workshops informal and fun and not too much of a burden for the teachers.

During the first or second week, I sent out an e-mail announcing the workshops to all of the professors in the English department and at the

language lab. Based on the responses I got, I set up a time and meeting location. A few days before each meeting, I sent out a reminder e-mail with the chosen article to all the workshop participants, the department, and the language lab.

Contacts for the Teacher Workshop: The following people have asked to be contacted directly about the Teacher Workshop. Sometimes the university e-mail list doesn't reach everyone, so best to also have your own list. They also said they'd be happy to meet with you as soon as you get there so that they can help you settle in!

- ❑ Silvia Jaskilioff (silviajaskilioff@gmail.com)
- ❑ Marcelo Lucero (marceloraullucero@yahoo.com.ar)
- ❑ Beatriz Viglizzo (bati_viglizzo@hotmail.com)
- ❑ Graciela Del Río (gracielandelrio@hotmail.com)
- ❑ Marcela Burger (maburger@infovia.com.ar)
- ❑ Cecilia de Pablo (ceciliamail@copetel.com.ar)

- iii. Academic Writing Workshops: There is both a need and a desire for extra help in academic writing. During the first semester, when I had less to do, I ended up offering anywhere from three to eight hours of writing help for students taking the history class I was assisting in. Second semester, I ran a weekly three-hour workshop open to anyone at the *profesorado*. In the workshop, I had students bring several copies of an essay they were working on (or had already handed in) to workshop. Write instructions for what students need to bring on any sort of advertisement you make. The writing workshop has less to do with "English" help as it does with "academic" support. Much of the work I did was related to the critical thinking needed to create an analysis and the process of organizing ideas. It might be useful to look at a few "teaching writing" books and choose one (with exercises) to bring.
- iv. English Enrichment Workshop Series: I began a series of workshops during the second semester that worked quite well. I wish that I had started them in the first semester because the students gave me really positive feedback and they were a joy to plan and teach. At the *profesorado*, students and teachers are extremely busy with challenging course schedules, work, and personal lives. I thought it would be useful to offer a series of workshops about everything and anything I thought would be useful and/or enriching. With the more academic activities, I emphasized that the workshops were totally informal and the sole purpose was to learn just for the sheer joy of learning. Along this line, I tried to choose things that weren't always specifically designed to "teach culture or language." This type of attitude helped students, particularly more shy students, feel more comfortable sharing their ideas and kept the workshops from being a stressful activity. Students have expressed interest in more workshops for the coming year. This is obviously something that would be great to semi-plan before coming to Argentina as some

materials are more easily accessible in the U.S. Some of the workshops I offered:

- ❑ *Professional Skill Development*: Resumes, cover letters, interview vocabulary, mock interviews, etc. Talk to Hernan, the *bedel*, about renting out the computer lab at the top of the humanities building for any sort of resume/cover letter workshop.
- ❑ *Poetry*: I put up posters and sent out announcement e-mails, then sent out 2-4 poems depending on the topic to students who responded. We met at one of the cafes by the university and went through an informal analysis, looking at the poems from literary, social, and historical perspectives.
- ❑ *Short Stories*: Same format as the poetry workshops, just with short stories.
- ❑ *Cooking in English*: Students loved this activity. About midway through the semester, I invited my various classes to my house to bake in English. They did everything in English from the grocery shopping to the actual cooking. It was a really great activity to bond the students and get a really great comfort level in the classroom as well as introduce new foods. If you're planning on doing this, any ingredients you think you might not be able to get in Argentina.
- ❑ *Games Night*: Students *loved* the game Taboo. Bring it (and prepare to leave it at the end of your stay!) and any other sort of verbal group game. My students said that they would love more reasons to get together and practice English and said that they would enjoy a "games night."

- v. Film Class: During the second semester, I co-taught a film class with the other Fulbrighter in Mar del Plata. We organized the class to be every other Friday morning and attracted a dedicated group of students of all ages, backgrounds, and language levels. Our focus was to: 1) to expand our vocabulary with a focus on slang and colloquial expressions; 2) to consider and discuss portrayals of different cultures and "real life" in the U.S.; and 3) to analyze film as an art form. For each class we created a worksheet with vocabulary from the film and discussion questions. We taught vocab at the beginning of class, showed the film, then led a guided discussion. It was useful to divide students into mini-groups if there were a lot of questions so that less confident individuals had an opportunity to speak. Each class lasted 3 hours. All of the students have enthusiastically requested another film class next year.

If this idea interests you, it would be a good idea to bring movies from the U.S. because the selection of English-language movies is largely limited to mainstream Hollywood movies. Good movies are older movies or non-blockbusters. In case you don't want to repeat a movie, we showed *American History X*, *Sicko*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Donnie Darko*, *The Full Monty*, and *Fight Club*.

Contact Marcela Calvete and Juan Gomez, the current directors of the language laboratory, to propose the class. They are both familiar with the Fulbright program and will welcome your e-mail: idiomlab@mdp.edu.ar

- vi. Visiting Public Schools and English Institutes in Mar del Plata: Another option is to volunteer with public schools. If you're looking to volunteer on a regular basis, I would suggest contacting Graciela Gadowski at gadowski@mdp.edu.ar. She is a pedagogy teacher at the university and has many contacts within the public school system. She was a tremendous help in finding public schools and helping me get involved with them.

If you don't want to commit to a regular volunteer schedule, many schools will be happy to have you visit once or twice to do activities with students or give a presentation on any aspect of U.S. culture. This was one of my favorite things I did during my time in Mar del Plata. Send out an e-mail to all professors (at the university and at the lab) offering to visit their classrooms and mention that you would be happy to visit any other institutions where they work as well. I found that photo slide shows are a fabulous tool for presenting culture– if you have a Mac, you can use the program iDVD or iMovie and create a slide show that can be played on any dvd player. Some helpful contacts to get you started:

- ☐ Marcela Burger (maburger@infovia.com.ar): Marcela works at the language lab teaching Spanish to foreigners, but she also teaches as a public school.
- ☐ Silvia Jaskilioff (silviajaskilioff@gmail.com): Silvia teaches English at the university to students who are studying other majors, but who need to be able to read in English. She also teaches at a public school.
- ☐ Cecilia de Pablo (ceciliamail@copetel.com.ar): Cecilia teaches English at a private school.
- ☐ Fabiana Miceli (famiceli@hotmail.com): Fabiana is the head of the English department at a public technical school downtown. She would be interested in you helping with an in-service training for her teachers.

3. *Communication:* I would recommend using as many different forms of communication as possible to organize and announce your activities.
- a. *Mass E-mail:* You can send out mass e-mails to the faculty and student body by sending an e-mail to modernas@mdp.edu.ar. You can also send them to the language lab at idiomlab@mdp.edu.ar. Give each e-mail a specific title and only send out information about one activity per e-mail. I found that if I included information about several things (classroom visits, workshops, etc.), I received very few responses. However, if I sent out 5 different e-mails, each with a specific subject line and information about one specific activity, I received a greater response.
 - b. *Personal E-mail:* From the moment you arrive in Mar del Plata, collect the e-mail of every person who shows interest in your work. Every time you announce a new activity, send out an e-mail to this group of people.

- c. *Flyering*: Print flyers for everything you do and tape them outside the department. If you are announcing a regular activity (such as conversation workshops), create a concise flyer with all necessary information and have the secretary post it inside the glass-covered announcement board. This added protection will keep your announcements from being ripped down.

Things To Bring From Home

- a. *Food*: If you like your food spicy, consider bringing spices and packaged hot sauce from home. What the typical U.S. palate finds spicy and what the typical Argentine palate finds spicy is generally quite different. Another thought is to bring unusual spices (garam masala, for example). I was happy to have brought spices and grains like quinoa (and recipes from home) so that I could share traditional dishes from the U.S. and international cuisine with my students and friends. Maple syrup was also great for organizing an “American” breakfast with students.
- b. *Literary resources*: poetry collections, short story collections, recipes. The students have requested, in particular, that you bring short stories and novels.
- c. *Music/Movies*: Both to share and to use in class.
- d. *Laptop*: It was really convenient to have my laptop (portable speakers would have been useful as well) to play music in class. If you don’t have internet in your house at first, there is a free computer lab on the top of the humanities building and another on the bottom floor of the economics building. The economics computer lab has really cheap printing options.
- e. *Anything electronic that you think you might have to buy*: There is a high tax on electronic goods in Argentina which makes them quite expensive. Bring blank CDs, DVDs, wifi router – whatever you think you’ll need.
- f. *USB Drive*: Having a flash drive was essential for being able to bring worksheets that I created at home to print at the university.
- g. *Warm clothing*: Mar del Plata gets really cold! Bring a winter coat, gloves, warm socks, etc. Layers are essential.

Housing: See previous guide *A Fulbrighter’s Guide to Mar del Plata*. I found my apartment in the classified ads of the local paper. I paid AR\$660 per month for a really nice, fully furnished apartment on the 18th floor of an apartment building overlooking Plaza San Martin.

Fun in Mar del Plata

- a. *The Atlantic Coast*: Take advantage of your first few weekends to check out the other coastal towns. Unfortunately, the grant starts in March, at the very end of the Argentine summer, and ends just as the weather begins to warm up again. Many of the cities close to Mar del Plata are beach towns that turn sleepy once winter hits. Try to see them while they’re still warm and active.
- b. *Cultural Activities*: Luckily, Mar del Plata remains active all year round. There is an active cultural scene. Every month, the tourism office prints a guide with all the cultural offerings in the city. You can buy a great map of the city at the tourist

- office for 2 Argentine pesos. It comes with various walking tours of the city on the back. Also, check out the *carteleras* (discount box offices) for discount tickets to movie theaters, plays, dinner shows, etc. There is one located on the *peatonal* (pedestrian street).
- c. *Nightlife*: In Mar del Plata, there are three principal going out areas. The first is in the area around Hipolito Yrigoyen and Alberti. There is a collection of bars there that fill up on weekends. Often, people go out to dinner or to a friend's house, then to the Yrigoyen bars, and then dancing on Constitucion Avenue or to Alem (another area filled with bars). People don't go out to clubs until 3am or later, so take a nap. The more you do it, the easier it gets!
 - d. *The Port*: Mar del Plata is home to a colony of 800 sea lions! Go to the port and check them out.
 - e. *The Bosque*: The Bosque is actually not a forest, but a wooded neighborhood in the south of the city. There is a tea house called *Cabana del Bosque* that is charming and has amazing tea and cakes. It's definitely worth the trek! Note: In the winter, it's only open on the weekends, so call ahead.

Taxis/Buses

- a. *Buses*: Buses are plentiful and efficient in Mar del Plata. You can purchase a bus guide at any newspaper stand in the city. In order to ride the bus, you need to purchase a bus card for 50 Argentine cents. Each ride costs AR\$1.40. Exercise caution with your bus card! It will demagnetize and render itself worthless if kept next to credit cards, coins, keys, or any other demagnetizing object. If you do demagnetize your card, most bus drivers will generally let you ride for free. If you had a lot of credit, tell the bus driver. He or she will cut off the corner of the card and you can take it to the bus card office on Santiago del Estero and they will put the remaining credit on a new card.
- b. *Taxis*: Taxis are the preferred way of traveling at night in Mar del Plata. I generally traveled by bus and did not have any problems, but taxis are the safer alternative. They are plentiful and relatively cheap. You can hail one down on the street or go to a taxi stand.
- c. *Remises*: Remises are another option for traveling at night. They are like taxis, but run by private companies. When you need one, you call the number, tell the operator where you are, and the remise picks you up five to ten minutes later. Remises are considered to be more secure than taxis and are priced similarly. Ask a friend for a number of his or her preferred remise company and keep it in your cell phone.

Traveling Around Argentina

- a. *By Bus*: Traveling by bus (*por micro*) is by far the most convenient mode of travel in Argentina. Air travel is expensive (foreigners are charged a more expensive rate than Argentines, often double the price!) and is subject to frequent delays due to weather and strikes. The buses in Argentina are luxurious, often with movies and snacks onboard. Although not entirely necessary, I would suggest buying your bus ticket at least a day in advance to guarantee that you get a spot on the bus and that you have some say in where you sit on the bus. Although you can

access locations all over the country from Mar del Plata, it is often cheaper to find tickets leaving from Buenos Aires. Combine this savings with the less expensive train fare from MDP to BsAs and you can make your Fulbright stipend go much farther!

Generally, there are three classes of bus tickets: *semi-cama*, *cama*, and *suite*, with *suite* being the nicest. Depending on the bus company, however, *semi-cama* and *cama* can vary. When you buy your ticket, check to see if the seats are three-across or four-across. If they are three-across, you can be relatively confident that they are spacious and comfortable. If they are four-across, you'll likely be cramped. Another hint: when you buy your ticket, ask what *servicios* they have. Bus services range from nothing (just water and coffee with incredible amounts of sugar) to movies, hot dinners, and a glass of wine.

At the current moment, all bus companies have the same price (AR\$ 75) to Buenos Aires, except for Micromar/Alte. Brown. This company is generally at least 5-10 pesos less expensive. This price rose AR\$10 during my eight months there because of inflation. One of the nicest services to Buenos Aires is provided by Tony Tur. The seats are comfortable and you get a newspaper and Havana-brand *alfajores*.

- b. *By Train*: Mar del Plata has a train that offers twice-daily service to and from Buenos Aires (<http://www.ferrobaires.gba.gov.ar>). Traveling by train is less luxurious than by bus, but it is also much less expensive. At the moment, one-way to Buenos Aires by bus is 75 pesos; one-way to Buenos Aires by train is 35 pesos. The downside to the train is that it takes about 45 minutes longer than the bus and sometimes breaks down. Even so, it is my preferred method of getting to Buenos Aires. I advise caution in the winter, however, because the train can get extremely cold inside, particularly at night.

A Few Other Notes

- a. *Buenos Aires*: In Buenos Aires, buy a "Guia T" at any newspaper stand. This is a map to the entire city with a metro/bus guide. You can go anywhere! Also, in Buenos Aires, hoard your coins because the buses accept only coins and somehow there is a permanent shortage. Some good food in BsAs: Tandoor (www.tandoor.com.ar) is the best Indian food in the city (you may miss it after awhile). Pura Vida (www.puravida.com.ar) is a really great juice bar with natural food, including a great tofu quinoa wrap.